



NEWSLETTER #9

BRACING

Prospective handlers often expect to use their future service dog as they would a cane. They expect to put downward pressure on their dog's back or shoulders to help them balance, stand or walk. Why is this potentially dangerous? Placing downward pressure on a dog can lead to spinal disc damage with potential for irreversible spinal cord compression. Dogs are susceptible to spinal degeneration and injuries, which would end the career of a service dog. Now, there is no evidence that downward pressure or weight-bearing bracing is safe for dogs either. It is never appropriate for a dog to brace against downward force on its shoulders or back, and this practice must be discontinued. A service dog can assist a handler who has difficulty sitting, standing, kneeling, squatting or walking in other ways. Although this task is still widely used, it is slowly being phased out while more options to assist handlers are becoming more available.

Please see our letter from our veterinarian and their opinion on bracing.

What is an Anchor Brace?

An Anchor brace is a tension brace between an ambulatory handler and a service dog. The dog wears a harness that distributes pressure across her body. A CB handle or short pull strap is connected to it. The handler grasps the handle and leans away from the dog and then the dog leans away from the handler. The tension created by the dog's brace keeps the handler upright when they experience weakness, dizziness, vertigo,

presyncope or similar symptoms. This brace is named for a dog anchoring the handler with her body mass and core strength. This task can be encouraged from naturally occurring behavior and you can capture this and use this task carefully under the age of 2 as long as the dog is a min of 55 pounds and stands at least 22" at the withers. Remember, when using a CB handle you are pulling up and away, never downward! This even goes with counterbalance. A counterbalance is an anchor brace in motion and should not ever be used until the dog is cleared, as its far more taxing on the dog's body.

An Anchor Brace is usually performed when the dog is in Heel or Front position. If the dog is in a heel position, you lean to the right the dog leans to the left. If the dog is in a front position, you lean back and the dog leans forward.

What is a Directional Brace?

Directional braces are those in which a dog resists the handler's pressure against their body in any direction except downward. A dog can perform directional braces in a Sit, Down and Stand position to support a handler who is sitting, standing or lying down. Handlers with a variety of health conditions, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, dysautonomia, vertigo, chronic pain or syncope disorders, use directional braces. Again, another behavior that dogs naturally do that you can capture at a young age.

For this task, the dog resists the handler's pressure against his body, by leaning against the handler. The dog is to maintain its position. The dog should not shift its weight or move its paws. The dog needs to maintain its head position and should not move suddenly. So, how does this work when you are in different body positions?

Directional Braces for Sitting

A dog can brace to help its handler sit upright.

1. The handler pulls the dog towards them, and then the dog leans away from the handler. The tension between them holds the handler in a sitting position.
2. The handler and dog sit next to each other. The handler leans against the dog and the dog leans against the handler, which holds the handler up in a sitting position.
3. The dog leans against the handler's abdomen to provide compression and postural support. This brace is appropriate in school and workplace settings in which a person may be expected to sit upright for periods longer than they are physically able to do so.
4. A large dog can perform abdominal compression or a directional brace in a Front position when his handler is seated in a chair.

Directional Braces for Standing or Kneeling

1. A dog can balance a handler who is standing by leaning against their leg.
2. A dog can support a seated handler from the Front position. This directional brace can be used when a handler is sitting, squatting or kneeling.
3. A dog can apply a forceful brace with their skull as shown. Some dogs push the back of their handler's wheelchair with their skull to help the handler traverse a raised threshold.
4. A dog can balance a handler in a crouch, squat or kneel position by performing a Stand-Stay in Heel position and leaning toward the handler while the handler leans against the dog's ribcage.

What else can my dog do to assist me if I am down on the ground and need help? If your dog has gear on and is cleared for mobility (2 years of age over 55 pounds) you can teach FMP to help pull you up. You also can teach the tug command, where the dog brings you a specific tug toy and the dog uses that force to bring the handler to their knees to help them better get up. If the dog is too young for this, have the dog trained to retrieve your phone to call for help, your cane or walker, a small stool or be trained to hit a button to call emergency services. If you're an extreme fall risk, it is also advisable to have a Fall Detection Device that detects if the handler falls that has GPS location on it and the handler can always

wear it. The dog can be trained to retrieve this as well for the handler since its smaller and lightweight compared to a phone. There is nothing wrong with calling for help if needed! EMS would much rather come and help you up off the ground then you stay on the ground longer than necessary for your safety. It doesn't mean you have to go to the hospital!

If you are interested in capturing these behaviors or need help training, contact us today to find out about our virtual one-on-one options for service dog training. Questions about this week's topic? Send us an email today!

We also would love for our followers to now know that were not only ABC-SDT certified, but now have our AKC CGC/TD Evaluators License! This means we can now broaden our range of services to anyone who wishes to acquire their Canine Good Citizens as well as their Trick Dog Titles can contact us today!

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey. Stay tuned for our upcoming newsletters as we delve deeper into the fascinating world of service dogs.

Warm regards,

The Pup-Cessories Crafts Team

Soon to be re-branded as "Koda the Corso Dog Training & Gear by PC"



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To Whom It May Concern:

In regards to service dogs helping people up off the floor, it is advisable to use methods other than pressure on the dog's back to assist getting up. Even non-working dogs develop back issues and degenerative changes. With excessive pressure on the back, these changes may accelerate and decrease the working time span of a service dog.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra J McAvoy DVM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandra J McAvoy, DVM

"All the love and care your pet needs to stay healthy"